

Message Text

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44

ACTION AF-18

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PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2127

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, SOCI, CM

SUBJECT: STUDENT UNREST AT UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE

1. PEACEABLE STUDENT DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED MORNING DECEMBER 3 AT UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE OVER STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS. TIMING TIED TO (A) CURRENT MEETING OF UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP BOARD AND (B) FORMAL OPENING OF INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN STUDIES WHICH NUMBER OF DIGNITARIES WOULD ATTEND AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION SCHEDULED TO OPEN. THIS WAS SEEN BY STUDENTS, APPARENTLY, AS A OPPORTUNITY TO ASSURE THAT THEIR GRIEVANCES WOULD BECOME PUBLICLY KNOWN.

2. STUDENT DEMANDS, AS LISTED ON "ORDER OF THE DAY" CHALKED ON SIGNBOARD IN FRONT OF MAIN AUDITORIUM INCLUDED (A) DISSOLUTION OF STUDENT FEDERATION, (B) SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ALL, AND (C) RESIGNATION OF MINISTER OF EDUCATION ZACHEE MONGO SOO. ESSENCE OF GRIEVANCES, HOWEVER, AS EXPLAINED BY STUDENT ACQUAINTANCE TO PAO, THERE FOR COLLOQUIUM, WAS SCHOLARSHIPS. COMPLAINT WAS THAT SCHOLARSHIPS BEING PROVIDED ON DISCRIMINATORY BASIS, AWARDED TO SOME WHO DON'T NEED THEM AND DENIED TO OTHERS WHO DO. THERE SAID TO BE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BEGINNING STUDENTS WHO DO NOT GET AS GENEROUS

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AWARDS AS THOSE IN SENIOR YEARS. OBJECTION TO STUDENT

FEDERATION SAID TO BE BASED ON ITS INADEQUATE REPRESENTATION OF ENTIRE STUDENT BODY ON THIS ISSUE.

3. DEMONSTRATION SIMPLY CONSISTED OF STUDENTS MILLING ABOUT IN FRONT OF BUILDING AFTER HAVING BOYCOTTED EARLY MORNING CLASSES. IT APPARENTLY SUCCESSFULLY BROUGHT ACTIVITIES TO A HALT, BUT WAS TOTALLY NON-VIOLENT AND IN FACT HAD FESTIVE, HOLIDAY AIR ABOUT IT. ESTIMATED 1,000 TO 1,500 STUDENTS WERE PRESENT. MANY OF DIGNITARIES THERE FOR COLLOQUIM (INCLUDING SEC GEN OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION WHO WAS FORCED TO READ SIGNBOARD BUT OTHERWISE UNMOLESTED) STOOD ABOUT WATCHING AND CHATTING. POLICE UNIT WHICH ARRIVED WAS SENT AWAY BY UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS, BUT TRUCK CONTAINING ABOUT 50 HEAVILY ARMED POLICE WAS STANDING BY A COUPLE OF BLOCKS AWAY IN CASE OF NEED. THERE WERE NO SPEECHES. AFTER A BIT OVER AN HOUR, STUDENTS BEGAN TO DRIFT AWAY, AND DEMONSTRATION SEEMED TO PETER OUT.

4. COMMENT. IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE A YEAR AGO, MINISTER OF EDUCATION BLAMED "MANIFESTATIONS OF STUDENT DISCONTENT" LARGE- LY ON SCHOLARSHIP PROBLEM, POINTING OUT THAT WITH 4,500 STUDENTS IT WAS NO LONGER POSSIBLE PROVIDE FULL SUBSISTENCE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ALL. HE SAID ONLY MOST NEEDY AND MOST OUTSTANDING STUDENTS WOULD RECEIVE FULL SUPPORT IN FUTURE. WITH ENROLLMENT BOOSTED BY SOME 2,000 THIS YEAR, IT CLEAR THAT CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP BOARD'S DECISIONS WOULD LEAVE MANY MORE STUDENTS DISSATISFIED--AND WITH LESS TO LOSE BY OPENLY DEMONSTRATING THEIR DISSATISFACTION. CHARGES OF DISCRIMINATION AT UNIVERSITY ON TRIBAL OR LINGUISTIC BASIS ARE NOT NEW. IT WILL BE HARD FOR SCHOLARSHIP BOARD TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST THEM WHILE AWARDING SCHOLARSHIPS OF VARYING LEVELS DERIVING FROM EVALUATION BASED BOTH ON NEED AND RELATIVE ACADEMIC STANDING.
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